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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7094  
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INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE  
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 8014  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 4981  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 4831  
RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 6319  
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 4750  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 002315

SIPDIS

STATE PASS BBG  
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WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
NSC  
CMC WASHINGTON DC FOR POLAD

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD  
LONDON FOR HKANONA AND POL - TSOU  
PARIS ALSO FOR POL  
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E.O. 12958: N/A  
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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (12/24): Stories on "Christmas under occupation" run throughout the Palestinian media

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Main Stories:  
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The three dailies lead with reports that a Hamas delegate is heading to Syria to consult with Hamas leaders there on the group's response to the Israeli offer regarding the prisoner exchange deal. Al-Hayat Al-Jadida front pages news reporting that the return of the German mediator is dependent on Hamas' response. The report also notes that the Israeli proposal to expel more than 100 prisoners might "impede" the deal. Al-Quds reports that the "expulsion proposal" will be presented to the prisoners to decide for themselves. Al-Ayyam carries a report from DPA saying that unprecedented security measures are in place at the Rafah crossing in preparation for an exchange deal.

The three dailies run stories on the Chief Mufti and the PA Ministers of Tourism and Awqaf condemning Israel's widespread excavations under the Al-Aqsa mosque compound, including stealing stones and monuments from the Ummayyad palaces near the mosque. Al-Ayyam and Al-Quds report that Israeli authorities will continue their excavations for the third consecutive day.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadida and Al-Ayyam run stories on the separation barrier's negative impact on Christmas in Bethlehem. Al-Ayyam notes that when the wall is complete, Bethlehem will be separated from Jerusalem for the first time in "2000 years of Christianity." In related news, Al-Quds' lead photo highlights the visit of "Santa Claus" to the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood to distribute gifts to children evacuated from their homes by settlers.

The three dailies quote Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad saying that "the [Palestinian internal] division has been

prolonged and should be ended" during a march on the International Day of the Disabled in Ramallah organized by the Red Crescent. Al-Hayat Al-Jadida highlights a photo of PM Fayyad signing an agreement worth 50 million Euros with the EU.

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BLOCK QUOTE:  
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Al-Ayyam runs an editorial by Talal Owkal under the title "It's Important that Israel Bow" saying, "In all cases, Palestinians should stick to their demands [on the prisoner exchange deal] even if that means more endurance is needed. That's because Israel will 'bow' at the end, and it's important that it 'bows' for once in front of the Palestinians."

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Palestine Cyberspace:  
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This week, Palestinian cyberspace focused on the prisoner exchange deal and stories, anecdotes, and photos of "Christmas under occupation." Many Palestinian social media sites circulated a report on Al-Jazeera English titled "Christmas 'under siege' in Bethlehem." Watch the video at:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4L3hv6t7cHs>

\*\* Due to the Christmas holiday, there will not be a media reaction tomorrow, December 25.

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